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Department of State TELEGRAM

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 12737

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR 033245
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FOLLOWING SENT ACTION SAIGON FROM DANANG AUG 9 REPEATED
FOR YOUR INFO
QUOTE
C O N F I D E N T I A L DANANG 174

SUBJ: HUE/THUA THIEN REACTION TO APPARENT DISQUALIFICATION VICE PRESIDENT KY

REF: DANANG 173

1. FOLLOWING IS A SUMMARY OF REPORT BY CONRDS THUA THIEN POLITICAL REPORTER JOHN GRAHAM ON REACTION TO KY'S APPARENT DISQUALIFICATION. GRAHAM INTERVIEWED FOLLOWING LOCAL LEADERS:

COUNCIL CHAIRMAN, (LEFTIST, AN QUANG);

COUNCIL MEMBER, (RIGHTIST, DAI VIET);

UNIVERSITY RECTOR, (MODERATE);

PARTY CHIEF, (MODERATE);

(MODERATE, PRO-THIEU

(BUDDHIS, MONK, (RADICAL, AN QUANG). FULL REPORT BEING TRANSMITTED THROUGH CORDS CHANNELS.

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2. ARTICLE 10: ALL SOURCES EXCEPT RECTOR VIEWED ARTICLE 10 AS DELIBERATE EFFORT BY THIEU TO "LEGALLY" BAR KY FROM RACE. NOTED ADDITIONAL REASONABLE INTENT OF BARRING CAPRICIOUS, UNQUALIFIED CANDIDATES. ALL SIX AGREED THAT ANY ELECTION LAW WHOSE RESULT WAS BARRING VICE PRESIDENT KY FROM RUNNING WAS MISTAKE FOR VIET-NAM. SUCH A LAW VIEWED LESS AS "ILLEGAL" OR "CORRUPT" THAN BACKROOM POLITICAL MANEUVER WHOSE ULTIMATE EFFECTS MAY SIGNIFICANTLY AND DANGEROUSLY EXCEED ITS INTENT.

3. KY'S CHANGES: SOURCES CONSIDER KY DOWN BUT NOT OUT OF RACE. WHILE SEVERAL CITED POSSIBLE REVERSAL BY SUPREME COURT OR EX POST FACTO AMENDMENT OF ARTICLE 10, GENERAL FEELING IS THAT IF KY IS PERMITTED TO RUN IT WILL BE AS RESULT OF PRESSURE ON THIEU FROM TOP RANK MILITARY LEADERS. MINH'S ATTITUDE ON CONTINUING RACE WOULD BE DECISIVE FACTOR IN THESE TOP LEVEL DISCUSSIONS.

4. IF KY IS OUT OF RACE: IF MINH RUNS ALONE AGAINST THIEU ONLY THINKS MINH HAS A CHANCE. OTHER SOURCES CONSIDER MINH CANDIDACY HOPELESS WITHOUT KY IN RACE. SAID THAT THIEU/MINH RACE WOULD BE CONTEST BETWEEN POWER AND POPULARITY, AND THAT POWER ALWAYS WINS. THIS, HE ADDED, IS SYMBOLIC OF US POLICY--"ALWAYS PLUGGED INTO THE PLUTOCRATIC TOP LAYERS OF SOCIAL PYRAMID AND DIVORCED FROM BOTTOM". CHAIRMAN STATED COUNCIL INTENDS SEND CABLE TO MINH URGING HIM TO WITHDRAW RATHER THAN LOSE PRESTIGE BY FAILING IN RIGGED ELECTION. ECHOED THESE SENTIMENTS.

5. IF MINH WITHDRAWS: ALL NOTABLES AGREED KY'S DISQUALIFICATION INCREASED CHANCES MINH WILL WITHDRAW. ALL AGREED "ELECTION" WOULD THEN BECOME MEANINGLESS FARCE. STATED PRESIDENT THIEU WOULD CANCEL ELECTION RATHER THAN RUN UNOPPOSED IN FEAR THAT FEW PEOPLE WOULD NOT BOTHER TO VOTE. STATED THAT UNOPPOSED RENEWAL OF THIEU'S PRESIDENCY WOULD NOT RENEW MANDATE TO RULE IN EYES OF THE PEOPLE AND COULD LEAD TO BREAKDOWN OF MORALE, INTERNAL DISCIPLINE AND FUNCTIONING OF GOVERNMENT. STATED MINH'S WITHDRAWAL WOULD MEAN BLOOD IN THE STREETS, REMINISCENT OF 1963 AND 1966. ADDED THAT CHIEF DANGER OF UNOPPOSED CANDIDACY WOULD BE CRITICISM OF GVN IN INTERNATIONAL PRESS.

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6. THE AMERICAN ROLE: [redacted] POLITICALLY SKEPTICAL THAT US WAS INDEED NEUTRAL IN KY'S DISQUALIFICATION. CHAIRMAN [redacted] OPENLY SKEPTICAL AND AGGRESSIVE, CHARGING US HAS BEGUN "SETTING UP" VIET-NAM FOR COALITION GOVERNMENT BEGINNING WITH PENTAGON PAPERS AND DRUG CHARGES. HE SAID US AIM WAS TO HAVE THIEU SUCCEED HIMSELF UNOPPOSED, STUMBLE ALONG WITHOUT POPULAR MANDATE FOR SEVERAL MONTHS (UNTIL SINO-AMERICAN ACCORDS ARE REACHED), AND THEN SERVE AS A SUMBOL OF "OLD VIET-NAM" WHICH US COULD REMOVE AND REPLACE BY A NEW MAN (NOT MINH). [redacted] REPEATED AN QUANG LINE T[illegible]T US RESPONSIBLE FOR THIEU REGIME AND RECENT EVENTS, AND THAT US SHOULD NOW TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR PUTTING KY BACK IN RACE AND ENSURE FAIR ELECTION.

7. COMMENT BY CONSULATE ON HUE REACTION: REMARKS BY GRAHAM'S SOURCES COINCIDE GENERALLY WITH CONSULATE'S OBSERVATIONS BASED ON DA NANG SOURCES PER REFTEL. THERES APPEARS TO BE WIDESPREAD BELIEF THAT US HAS FUMBLED BALL IN ELECTION LAW AFFAIR, FIRST, BY PERMITTING THIEU REGIME TO PASS LAW AND, SECOND, BY FAILING TO BRING NECESSARY PRESSURE ON THIEU TO PERMIT KY TO RUN. SIMULTANEOUSLY THERE IS FEELING THAT IF THINGS ARE TO BE PUT RIGHT, IT WILL ONLY BE THROUGH US EFFORTS AND THAT RESPONSIBILITY FOR ANY SEMBLANCE OF MEANINGFUL ELECTIONS RESTS WITH THE US. IN READING GRAHAM'S REPORT, HOWEVER, WE SENSE ONE EMPHASIS OF POSSIBLE SIGNIFICANCE WHICH IS MISSING FROM DANANG SOUNDINGS. HUE SOURCES SEEM LESS INCLINED TO CONSIDER KY'S CANDIDACY DEAD ONCE AND FOR ALL. THERE APPEARS TO BE GREATER AWARENESS THAT ENTIRE SUPREME COURT COULD REVERSE DECISION OF OFFICE OF SUPREME COURT AND RESURRECT KY CANDIDACY. SIGNED BROWN. UNQUOTE

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